

HUNTER

THE PARTNERSHIP

Credit Swiss

Much written about, rarely interviewed, Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron have fostered a childhood friendship into a professional alliance that has made them the most influential architects from Switzerland to Miami, Beijing and beyond

By Alastair Gordon

THE FIRST duo to be awarded the Pritzker Prize, in 2001, Swiss natives Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron have broken the architectural mold in more ways than one. Not only have they created buildings that possess a truly 21st-century identity—and they have more than 40 new commissions around the world—but they have made their office more of a meritocracy than an autocracy. Born in 1950, they have been friends since school, and their partnership runs as a mirror to the intuitive form of communication they've developed over the years.

Each married with children in Basel, Herzog and de Meuron jog together twice a week. Their headquarters is on the site of what was once a medieval cloister, and there is still a monastic feeling to this hivelike collection of buildings. Since the firm moved here in 1988 (with a staff of only 14), the complex has expanded to include seven other buildings—among them a villa, a former toothpaste laboratory and an old factory shed—and an army of 350 employees.

Their work straddles a fine line between art and architecture, and many of the firm's best buildings

Pierre de Meuron (left) and Jacques Herzog with their model for the Miami Art Museum's new space, to open in 2011.



are collaborations with individual artists, most famously the Olympic "Bird's Nest," which they designed with Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. Their early work in the '80s and '90s was driven by a conspicuous minimalism. While others were obsessing about Palladio, the partners say they were thinking about Beuys. "This helped us to break into the field and create our own position," Herzog says.

It was the opening of the Tate Modern in London in 2000 that made them household names. While there may be no clear-cut signature style—the way one recognizes a building by, say, Frank Gehry or Zaha Hadid—there is a loose continuity of forms, materials and treatments that can be seen as unmistakably Herzog-and-de-Meuronian, this along with an almost mystical belief in the inherent beauty of materials: walls of "caged" rocks for the Dominus winery in the Napa Valley; a twisting tower of perforated copper for the de Young Museum in San Francisco; a shimmering crystal extrusion for Prada in Tokyo.

The firm has completed more than 100 built projects, and new commissions include a soaring triangular tower that is supposed to become a glowing beacon on the outer periphery of Paris and a philharmonic hall for Hamburg that resembles a melting iceberg. Their first New York high-rise was recently announced, despite the risky real-estate market—a pixilated glass skyscraper for 56 Leonard Street in lower Manhattan. The 57-story tower will have a large stainless-steel bubble by sculptor Anish Kapoor bulging out from the ground-floor lobby.

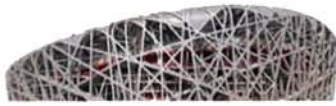
In the traditionally aggressive world of architecture, it's the credit-sharing and collaboration with their eight other partners (including Harry Guggler, Christine Binswanger, Ascan Mergenthaler and Stefan Marbach) that allows them to maintain the tremendous quality and quantity of their work. "It's part

De Meuron on Herzog:

'I couldn't do this without Jacques and Jacques couldn't do it without me. We are complementary. Jacques is my best friend and I am his best friend'

THE PROJECTS

A look at some of Herzog & de Meuron's recent and pending constructions



Clockwise from top left: Model of Beijing's "Bird's Nest" (2008); Tribeca's 56 Leonard, "new, but in the tradition of the early New York skyscraper," Herzog says (2010); Elbe Philharmonic Hall in Hamburg (2011); the "Triangle" at Porte de Versailles, Paris (2014).

of the genius of their office," says Terence Riley, director of the Miami Art Museum, who is working closely with the firm on a 200,000-square-foot expansion. "They never fall in love with one idea so much that they won't change it. They have this flexibility that comes from such a trusting partnership."

Pierre de Meuron

I couldn't do this without Jacques and Jacques couldn't do it without me. We are complementary. We are also friends. Jacques is my best friend and I am his best friend. Of course we would prefer to do everything together, but we can't be everywhere at the same time, so we have to split the responsibilities. Architecture is sometimes brutal. You have to follow what the clients say. Jacques is the voice of the office. He's better at that. I'm the one who runs the office.

In good moments I feel reminded

Herzog on de Meuron:

'We understood we could do things better when working together. You can only do this if you establish a dialogue and are willing to accept criticism'



or 80. Most offices just pass away. We want the company to stay alive. We also want to invite younger partners to participate in the responsibility of the office. We would like to stay here to inspire, not to block.

Jacques Herzog

Pierre and I came together as young kids and we understood that we could do things better when working together. You can only do this if you establish a dialogue and are willing to accept criticism. You accept it because you know you are going towards a better way. In the 1970s, we were much more influenced by artists than architects. There was nothing we could admire in our field. Like with every young person, you are unconsciously (or consciously) looking for something that is a revolution on a small scale, something that you have to remove in a kind of iconoclastic gesture, something that helps you establish a new way to look at the world. For young people it's always about that.

With 40 or more parallel projects, it's clear that you cannot always have the same intensity. It's like a doctor who has to make sure the quality doesn't suffer at the end of a busy day. We have Monday and Friday sessions where we go from one project to another according to a very strict schedule. Early on it was much more chaotic. You met whenever you had time; that was more fun but less effective. We will see which model brings better results.

I like to think of good architecture as a form of acupuncture. The idea is to release these energies and the ultimate quality is that you attract people and make them happy. ♦

of our childhood when we played with objects and produced things without really knowing where this would go. That's perhaps the reason we don't have a style, one kind of architecture where we would be recognizable. We try not to copy ourselves, but sometimes we work within the same family of ideas. We are always fighting this trap to become corporate.

We think of our office as a sort of village or a campus. Every studio has its own identity, which creates different working atmospheres. We never wanted the whole team in a big building with everyone assembled in one space even if it would sometimes be easier to oversee.

The computer is an important tool—but for me it's only a tool and it doesn't replace thinking. It can make you disconnected and autistic, and that's why we always say, "Bring it out of the computer, print it up, use paper, use physicalities and models to understand and anticipate what this thing will be in the end: something physical, something real, something for people."

Up to now, Jacques and I have been involved in every single project, but we cannot do that when we are 70